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I submit this short remembrance of my experience with capturing emus in Orange and Chatham County. You may publish it either as a letter or an op-ed or some other appropriate format.

I was Animal Control Director for the Orange County Health Department from 1994 until 2005, and for the Chatham County Health Department from 2005 until I retired in 2011. During that time in Orange County, my officers responded to and resolved three emu problems.

The first, and the only one in which the emu died, was one in which an emu of unknown origin was repeatedly reported running about at large by residents of rural Northern Orange County. No one had reported a lost emu. Our complainants, as they often did, demanded we get rid of it and did not express their preference for a humane resolution over a lethal one. In the open fields and pastures and woods of Northern Orange County, we believed we would not be able to catch it humanely anyway.

One morning Ken Brown, our most senior officer with 20 plus years, saw it at a wooded intersection west of Prospect Hill, near the Caswell County Line. Ken stopped his truck some distance from the bird so it would not be alerted. He put a single hollow point round in his .22 rifle and shot it in its tiny head, killing it instantly. Did I mention Ken was an excellent marksman? Needless to say we limited our reporting to our ordinary records., which of course were rarely ever requested or read. We did not want to cause a stink between our agency and the local Animal Protection Society with which we worked on a daily basis, so we eschewed publicity of the incident.

The second happier outcome happened when our youngest officer, Julian captured one alive in the eastern part of the county, near Durham. Julian was fit and strong, and not so old school as was Ken. He had been searching for the emu for a few weeks and we continued to receive reports of sightings. On this day, a caller phoned in the emu's location and it wasn't long before Julian and another officer arrived and spotted her(?). They had catch poles and tried to corner her. She then tried to bolt past Julian and he tackled her from her side and was thus able to avoid her deadly kick. (Emus, like ostriches, can execute a forward karate kick to the heart that can kill you.) That was the animal capture of the year!

Finally, one Sunday afternoon a livestock trailers overturned on I-40, just west of the Durham Chapel Hill Boulevard, and spilled 20 emus on the right (north) shoulder. Somehow, our responding on-call officer, Betsy, the truck driver and law enforcement were able to contain the emus against the fence while Durham City response workers righted the trailer. They then simply retrailered them, one by one. It took awhile but they made something simple out of what could have been a disaster for humans and birds alike.

I could only praise my officers in these three incidents for their persistence and efficiency in protecting the public safety.

I understand this emu has been sighted and even pursued in south Orange and northeast Chatham. So I wish my animal control colleagues in both counties the best of luck as they attempt to humanely capture this flightless but fast and elusive avian.

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